

COOL CHANGE CONTEMPORARY

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ANITA CUMMINS

MAIMUNAH ABDULLAH
RABIAH LETIZIA
ABDUL-KARIM ABDULLAH
ABDUL-RAHMAN ABDULLAH
ABDUL ABDULLAH

ANNA JOHN



ANITA CUMMINS: SOME KIND OF MOOD

GALLERY 1

in pursuit of independence and recovery

Aisyah Aaqil Sumito

My family home, it's a place which has been the subject of much of my creative practice because it symbolises so much of what I seek to recover from. I am in perpetual recovery, in perpetual pursuit of independence.

When I was sixteen I began taking medication, mostly to manage anxiety and depression, and began seeing a counsellor. I was easily pulled into the magnetic pulse of my self-destructive present. It took me three years and seven counsellors to begin to say things out loud, about the trauma I held in my body.

Before I was prescribed with fluoxetine hydrochloride, my therapist at the time suggested that depression was like trying to get out of a very, very, very deep well.

It is wet and there is no ladder. Nobody can hear you. It's near impossible to climb out, you can climb out though, really, but it's really hard. There is now a ladder in this deep well, handed down to you from above, a ladder that wasn't there before. The well is still very, very, very deep, and the ladder has many rungs. But it is easier.

And that medication was simply a tool that I could use to climb out. They were right, in a sense. Medication helped me a lot, but I have come to terms with the idea that I will always exist in this well of sadness. I've made a home here, I'm making it work.

Amidst this pursuit of adolescent emotional independence, I began collecting the blister packs and cardboard boxes that my medication came in. *I will make art with this one day*, I thought. *Something monumental. Something overbearing.* When you're a depressed and sentimental queer creative, the medication you take seems a first port of call for content. Something materially stark and symbolic for a broader understanding of how *fucking sad* you are. There is existentialism tied to fulfilling a daily task in order to remain well. To remain well enough to access employment and community, and to feel joy and stability day-to-day. After two years, I discarded the collected packaging, but my attachment to what it symbolised remained. Medication has been very helpful for me, and many others.

I hear a lot of stories about the harm done by doctors, counsellors, psychiatrists and specialists. I won't go into much detail, because I fear overstating concepts I don't truly have a grasp on...but, I can't help but consider social versus medical models of disability (please google this) that interplay the nature of prescription, and the way we talk about being medicated. [1] Let's look at broader societal factors, and the ways that they loop in and out and under each other. There is more to accessibility for neurodivergent and Disabled folx than treatment and taking medication. Especially if they already face multiple intersections of oppression, that prevent them from seeking this kind of care in the first place. In pursuit of wellness and independence we internalise the perpetual pressure to "recover" without communal support. Recovery suggests an end point.

There is no one way that neurocognitive function presents itself, as suggested within the neurodiversity paradigm, and as such, there is no one way to reduce





internal and external suffering. [2] Placing neurodiversity and disability into settler colonial medicalised hierarchies is oppressive. Much like queerness, transition and personhood in general, the possibilities of recovery and suffering are limitless and fluid – and we should treat it as such.

I am feeling very dysfunctional right now. Having conversations with people seems to become more and more difficult as time progresses. I feel irritable and simultaneously irritating. I am very anxious and tender, but it's hard to put my finger on why. Maybe I just don't have enough...fingers... to put on all these feelings and anxieties. That are all crossed over and muddled up. I used to be able to distinguish and process these overwhelming muddle of emotions, but I guess it's been a very long time since I've had to do that. I've lost the strength that I had before I started taking medication. This cluster and muddle and overlap of feelings is cloudy. And kind of terrifying. I feel like an elastic band is being pulled through my chest, and is being held there. The tension continually remains.

1. Retief, M. & Letšosa, R., 2018, 'Models of disability: A brief overview', HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies 74(1), a4738. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i1.4738>
2. Dr. Nick Walker, 2014, 'Neurodiversity: Some Basic Terms and Definitions', Neurocosmopolitanism(dot)com

Aisyah Aaqil Sumito is a queer and neurodivergent community artist, writer and thinker based on Whadjuk Noongar boodja.

Some kind of mood considers the everyday ritual of taking medication and going to therapy, both events that are commonly associated with mental and chronic illness.

Image: *Some kind of mood* (detail), 2019. Image courtesy of the artist.

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Anita Cummins is a queer artist living in Narm (Melbourne) on unceded Wurundjeri country. In response to various systems of oppression, their work aims to seek out and uncover alternative modes and methods for coping, healing and recovery. They employ the use of repetitive methodologies as a mechanism for the processing and exploration of complex emotional states.

In 2018 they received the Les Kossatz Memorial Award for their Honours graduate showcase. This led to their inclusion in the national graduate showcase Hatched at Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, for which they were awarded the Schenberg Fellowship 2019. They are currently completing a Master of Fine Art by research at Monash University. Previous exhibitions include *feelings*, Monash University, 2018; *Airbnb guest*, Sideshow, 2016; *Living Lab of Beauty*, Long Division, 2015 and *Quick Copy*, Bus Projects, 2013.

**MAIMUNAH ABDULLAH,
RABIAH LETIZIA,
ABDUL-KARIM ABDULLAH,
ABDUL-RAHMAN ABDULLAH,
ABDUL ABDULLAH: KASEH IBU
GALLERY 2**

Mum

Our mother came to this country for love. Her love has shaped and grounded me. We are here, in this space to celebrate her and share with you what she means to us.

My childhood memories are full of her creative and nurturing pursuits. Cooking was a shared process where we learnt about growing food, preparing and sharing it. There was the composting, chickens and a pet lamb (who was given away and later served up). Mum always kept an abundant, lush garden and could grow anything. This brings back images of Abdul-Rahman in the strawberry patch as a toddler in just his nappy, covered in red juice. Picking lemons and baking lemon cake for neighbors and friends that endlessly filled our house. Drinking cups of tea, borrowing sugar, building cubby houses and climbing the almond, oak or jacaranda tree. We took good cooking for granted. Mum's chicken curry, actually anything mum cooked tasted better than good.

Mum used quinoa, brown rice, sprouting and organic when it was uncool. Especially for me as a child who envied the white bread and Tim Tams my classmates brought to school. I can't thank her enough now. Even her vegemite sandwich (whole meal with cucumbers) didn't quite work but I thank you again mum. I see now

where you were going with it!

Mums love of plants inspired her to study Horticulture. I remember her files and books spread across the dining table, her reciting Latin names for different species, committing them to memory. Us kids standing by the car on the side of the road, shielding her while those ever-present secateurs clipped cuttings. We all had nets to catch insects; mum would dry and pin them. There were flowers to be pressed. Mum laying our lawn, installing the reticulation. Fond memories of a childhood with a garden and so much more.

Now, as you can see, mum paints the most beautiful and intricate plants, she is a master of Botanical Art. But you can't tell her that. She teaches children and adult's pottery and painting. She joins a group of fellow painters each week for as long as I can remember. Women painting together.

Mum completed a Fashion Design course and could already sew and make her own patterns. She made most of her clothes growing up, also for her siblings and here in Australia, for us. Mum sewed lingerie to support us through hard times. She sewed for friends and neighbours. My dresses were hand made from the time I was born to my wedding day. I remember flicking through magazines at seventeen looking for a ball dress. Mum made me a version I can look back on today without a hint of cringe, its timeless.

My wedding dress was perfect; mum's skills were exceptional. She hand dyed the brocade on all three bridesmaids dresses she also made. She took a make-up course, a cake decorating course and a flower arranging course for my bouquets.



Maimunah Abdullah, *Corymbia ficifolia*, 2019. Watercolour on paper, 60x48cm.



Maimunah Abdullah, 1972.

My own sub-standard abilities were always bolstered by the knowledge that mum will do it better. That mum will be here forever and always have my back.

That brings me to my mother's nature. Her character. Her strength. My mother came from an environment that valued education. She was denied it. Rather, her value was dictated by how well she could bear and raise children, look after a husband and cook.

My mother is continuously educating herself through courses and workshops. She then creates beauty and sustenance at the highest level. It doesn't stop there. Mum takes what she has learnt and shares with her community, teaching with the same dedication, care and directness she brought us up with. Whether they are troubled teens from disadvantaged backgrounds, people attending community centres with disabilities or social disadvantage, refugees, children and adults alike. Mum has always been able to create progress and connection where those with titles have not done so well.

Living in Australia wasn't easy. Mum came here as a migrant and with difference comes prejudice. It has affected all of us in different ways. I am fiercely protective of her. Mum always had to try harder for acceptance, even to be heard and that infuriates me. Yet she remains calm and I have raged. As a child one of my first reactions to overt racism was to poke out my tongue and pull a face. What followed was a slap and quiet reprimand from my mother.

Today my mother is proudly who she is and unapologetically speaks her mind as it should be. She doesn't want me to write about her because 'there is nothing to write'. This exhibition shouldn't be about her she

says, but we, her children will always place her front and centre, no matter how often she marches off at speed, pointing at something in the distance and disappearing between the isles.

Mum is unassumingly talented at everything she puts her hand to; the most educated of all of us (ten years of tertiary education at last count). She paints better than her teachers and her work sells - a true professional. She is kind and forgiving but never forgets. She taught me that you take the best from examples in your life and leave the worst behind. To grow is to evolve, be better. She listens and reflects and treats us fairly. Although I think I got more slaps growing up as the eldest.

Her maternal instinct sees our children unconditionally well loved, fed and looked after. Nenek is every grandchild's favorite. Their young lives are filled with her presence. I am so grateful for that.

We were united as an immediate family recently for my paternal grandmothers funeral. Fifty-seven hours on a plane, van and in an apartment. Despite the sad circumstances we were happy, reverting to childhood banter, cocooned in each other's presence with mum, of course at the centre. We share an unbreakable, close bond. My siblings and my parents can talk endlessly; we have so much love for each other. Mum was so joyous, she told me that we lift her up and give her confidence. That made my heart burst. I just wanted to hug her and never let go.

Rabiah Letizia

Kaseh Ibu (mother love), is a conversation between four children and their mother. A series of Maimunah Abdullah's recent botanical paintings provide the impetus for her children to reflect on the role of creativity in defining a family.

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Maimunah Abdullah (b. 1949) was born in Malaysia and emigrated to Australia in 1972. After obtaining a Diploma in Horticulture and Advanced Diploma in Fashion Design she has worked in a variety of roles including pattern maker and seamstress, and 25 years of tutoring children and adults classes in ceramics, painting and craft at Canning Arts Group. Maimunah has been an art and sewing tutor at Al-Hidayah Islamic School and Langford Islamic College, as well as working with at risk youth, refugees and families at Jacaranda Community Centre. As well as raising four children of her own, Maimunah has played an integral and often informal maternal and mentoring role within Muslim, migrant and indigenous communities.

Rabiah Letizia (b. 1973) holds a BSc Psychology (Curtin) and GradDipSc Psychology (UWA). Her interests lie in the inter-generational, community and cross-cultural aspects of Psychology. Since studying an MA in Community Psychology (ECU) she has managed a successful small business while balancing professional pursuits with motherhood.

Abdul-Karim Abdullah (b. 1974) currently holds the position of Prisoner Education Manager Metropolitan – Corrective Services, Department of Justice. He is a motivated educational leader with a Bachelor of Psychology (Honours); Graduate Diploma of Psychology; Graduate Diploma of Education (Secondary), Bachelor of Arts (Art); a Diploma of Arts (Art and Design); and a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

ANNA JOHN: SEA TOOTH (votum)

GALLERY 3

noise-cancelling for intelligent people

—
because
it doesn't work
sometimes
we have
a picture of it
this is true
of body
god
& politics
speech turns
the diagram
into a rebus
mouth symbols
loud
into an ear
cause tinnitus
the slip casts
us as fools
into its ocean
its fragments
(ostrakon)
parting gifts
voting tokens
the votive icon
spoken to
now mimes
its miracle
every oracle
needs an auricle

Abdul-Rahman Abdullah (b. 1977) is a West Australian artist whose practice explores the different ways that memory can inhabit and emerge from familial spaces. Working primarily in sculpture and installation, his work has been described as magic realism, creating poetic interventions with the space it occupies. While his own experiences as a Muslim Australian of mixed ethnicity provide a starting point, Abdul-Rahman foregrounds shared understandings of individual identity and new mythologies in a cross-cultural context.

A 2012 graduate of Curtin University, Abdul-Rahman exhibited most recently in *The National: New Australian Art 2019* at the MCA, Sydney. In 2017 he participated in *Dark Horizons* at Pataka Museum + Art (NZ) and in 2016 was included in *Magic Object: The Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art* at AGSA, Adelaide. In 2015 Abdul-Rahman and his brother Abdul Abdullah presented the first WA Focus exhibition at AGWA, Perth and in 2018 the Abdullah brothers were shortlisted for the 58th Venice Biennial.

Abdul Abdullah (b. 1986) is a multi-disciplinary artist from Perth, currently based in Sydney. As a self-described 'outsider amongst outsiders', his practice is primarily concerned with the experience of the 'other' in society. Abdullah's projects have engaged with different marginalised minority groups, with a focus on the experience of young Muslims in a multicultural Australian context. Through these processes and explorations Abdullah extrapolates this outlook to an examination of universal aspects of human nature.

In 2015 Abdul exhibited at *Primavera* at the MCA, Sydney, and at the *Asia Pacific Triennial* at GOMA, Brisbane. In 2016 he exhibited at ACCA and in 2017 he showed at *PATAKA Art Museum* in New Zealand and with *Yavuz Gallery* at *Art Basel Hong Kong* and the *Asia Now Art Fair* in Paris. Most recently Abdul exhibited at *MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum* in Chiangmai, The NGA as part of *Infinite Conversations*, and was shortlisted along with his brother Abdul-Rahman Abdullah to represent Australia in the 2019 Venice Biennale.

Little dramas play out on the smallest of stages. A shell becomes palimpsest, evidence left in trails and micro markings of its previous chance occupants. Objects appear on the shore in part, not whole: their histories obscure. Things float, without intended position. Whilst it's impossible to mirror that kind of chaos in conscious making, maybe it can be played out by softening the conditions of sculpture - allowing objects to be handled and moved by the audience, like the tide.



Anna John, *Sea Tooth*, 2019, ceramics, low melt alloy, silicone, fluff, perspex, found objects, dimensions variable. Image courtesy of the artist.



Sea Tooth (votum) is an emerging and ongoing collection of discrete objects, both made and found, that make up a seemingly disparate ecology. Common to all objects is their both their size and their wavering proximity from the things which they appeared to represent, or what they happen to look like. These mimetic musings make up a work that reconsiders the hierarchy of aesthetic experience. Unfixed from plinth or base, it is encouraged that the work scattered across the floor is to be handled, and re-positioned or placed anywhere within the Gallery 3 space, according to the audience.

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Anna John's practice is based in improvisational, process-led and performative approaches to sculpture. Having a parallel practice in music making, she is currently interested in where sculpture crosses over into 'instrument', where instrument is to be defined more broadly as a tool. She is currently based in Broome, on Yawuru/Djugan country.

Mitchel Cumming (b. 1988, Sydney, Australia) is an artist, poet and a founding co-director of KNULP gallery, Sydney. His work is concerned with peripheral and recessional gestures of aesthetic framing and address.

Anna John, *Sea Tooth*, 2019, ceramics, low melt alloy, silicone, fluff, perspex, found objects, dimensions variable. Image courtesy of the artist.

Cool Change Contemporary acknowledges the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation, the traditional and rightful custodians of the land on which we operate. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

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